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Democrats Assail Reagan for Linking Blast to Intelligence Cuts

Remarks 'Distorted,' President Charges

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President Reagan was quickly attacked by Democrats yesterday for his statement that the bombing of the U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut last week could be blamed on the "near-destruction" of American intelligence capability before he took office.

Reagan just as quickly retreated, saying his remarks had been "distorted" by the press, and the White House said later that Reagan did not mean to pin the "entire" blame for the intelligence cutbacks on his predecessor, Jimmy Carter.

Carter, in a statement from Atlanta, said Reagan's charge "is personally insulting and too gross in its implications to ignore. He only has to question his own administration officials to determine that his statement was also completely false."

Carter's CIA director, Adm. Stansfield Turner, said Reagan's comments "are undignified and unworthy of a president. It is Reagan who has damaged the CIA by putting in people of questionable character . . . he has politicized the CIA with [director William J.] Casey."

"What do you read about CIA today?" Turner asked in an interview. "You read about a director who has shady financial dealings and is involved in questionable legality and propriety in the secret war in Nicaragua . . . No wonder they are not collecting intelligence in Beirut because they're trying to undermine the government of Nicaragua."

Turner also said it was "too ludicrous for words that a president who has been in office for 3½ years would try to blame the past" for the latest terrorist attack.

Democratic presidential nominee Walter F. Mondale, who was Carter's vice presi-

dent, said Reagan's remark was "inexcusable" and "he should stand up and say he is responsible" for the Beirut attack.

As controversy continued to mount over the Sept. 20 bombing that killed two Americans, the third such fatal attack against U.S. installations in Lebanon in 17 months, Reagan was given the results yesterday of a "preliminary inquiry" by Robert Oakley of the State Department's office of counterterrorism, who just returned from Beirut.

Presidential spokesman Larry Speakes said it showed that security measures at the U.S. Embassy annex were incomplete, but Speakes said individual responsibility for that was not determined. When reporters pressed for further explanation, Speakes responded testily, "You want a head on a platter?"

Speakes also said Oakley told Reagan that "the judgment had been made" that the move from west to east Beirut "was on balance safer" than keeping the entire staff in west Beirut.

Speakes said Reagan would get a "comprehensive assessment" of the attack but "I don't know of any plans" for a formal inquiry like that following the October 1983 bombing of Marine headquarters that killed 241 U.S. servicemen.

The administration backed away from assigning blame to Carter for the Beirut bombing after Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) released a March 8 letter from Casey saying that "the increase in the personnel and budgetary strength of the agency began in 1979"—Carter's third year—and that "it was planned and proposed earlier."

Casey said he was "particularly pained" by a Wall Street Journal report last spring suggesting that Reagan's efforts to build up the CIA "will be a partisan political theme in the reelection campaign . . . I've checked and have been assured that there is no intention to go about and make any such issue."

Vice President Bush, campaigning in Michigan, said "I don't think anyone can say" personnel cuts at the CIA during Carter's term were to blame for a lack of intelligence about terrorism in Beirut. "On any specific incident I couldn't level that kind of charge," said Bush, who was CIA director under President Gerald R. Ford. However,

Bush yesterday called "inappropriate" the cuts in the CIA during Carter's term.

Reagan did not mention Carter directly on Wednesday when he answered a question from a student at Bowling Green State University about embassy security, complaining of the "near-destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years before we came" into office. Reporters were told by White House aides afterward that Reagan was talking about the Carter years.

Yesterday, Speakes said the aides who identified Carter as Reagan's target "didn't know what they were talking about."

Instead, Speakes said Reagan meant to describe "a decade-long trend of a climate in Congress that resulted in inadequate funding and support for intelligence gathering capabilities, specifically human intelligence." Speakes said this included the Ford and Carter years, that Reagan was not "putting blame entirely" on Carter. "We have reversed that trend," he said. Speakes also said Reagan was not directly addressing the intelligence situation in Beirut, even though the president made the remark in response to a question about the Lebanon bombing and referred to "this last tragedy" in the same answer.

Asked whether Reagan believes anyone in the CIA "screwed up" in the latest bombing, Speakes said, "No."

Carter said in his statement, "For more than 3½ years I have listened with disappointment and some degree of anger to a stream of false assertions made by President Reagan in his attempt to blame his every mistake and failure on me and others who served before him in the White House."

He also said, "This series of tragedies in the Middle East has been brought about by the president's own deeply flawed policy and inadequate security precautions in the face of proven danger. His frivolous reference to tardy kitchen repairs is indicative of his refusal to face the reality of his own responsibility." Reagan "should apologize for these misleading statements to the American people and particularly to the many suffering families of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives in Lebanon," Carter said.

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